providing a plurality of dispensing units that each hold a plurality of each of multiple distinct items, wherein the units have a processor and a memory for storing a record of inventory levels of each distinct item;

periodically sending restocking information from the dispensing units over a network to a server computer, wherein the restocking information includes a restock quantity for each distinct item;

aggregating the restock quantities over the plurality of dispensing units for each of the multiple distinct items;

generating ordering information for the items to be restocked based on the aggregated restocking information; and

electronically sending the ordering information to one or more supplier computers to order items to be restocked into the dispensing units.

2. (As Filed) A method as in claim 1, further comprising polling the dispensing units over the network using the server computer to obtain the quantities of the items to be restocked.

3. (As Filed) A method as in claim 1, further comprising generating the ordering information using the server computer, and wherein the ordering information generating step further comprises determining supplier information for the items to be ordered.

4. (As Filed) A method as in claim 3, electronically sending the ordering information from the server computer to an application computer having a hosted procurement application.

5. (As Filed) A method as in claim 4, accessing the hosted procurement application to view the ordering information on a display screen of a user computer, and

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further comprising producing one or more pages on the display screen of the user computer to permit the ordering information to be approved, modified or canceled.

6. (As Filed) A method as in claim 5, further comprising sending the ordering information from the application computer to an electronic requisition and purchasing system, and further comprising generating one or more electronic purchase order numbers using the electronic requisition and purchasing system and electronically sending the purchase order number to the application computer.

7. (As Filed) A method as in claim 6, further comprising electronically sending the purchase order number and the supplier information from the application computer to a business portal computer, and electronically sending the purchase order number from the business portal computer to the supplier computer based on the supplier information.

8. (As Filed) A method as in claim 7, further comprising electronically sending an advanced shipping notice from the supplier computer, to the business portal computer, to the application computer and to the server computer, wherein the advanced shipping notice includes information on items to be shipped, their quantities and a date of shipment.

9. (As Filed) A method as in claim 8, further comprising electronically sending information contained in the advanced shipping notice from the server computer to the dispensing units to apprise the dispensing units of the items and quantities to be shipped for restocking into the dispensing units.

10. (As Filed) A method as in claim 9, further comprising shipping at least some of the ordered items to the dispensing units that are contained in the advanced shipping notice.

11. (As Filed) A method as in claim 10, further comprising electronically sending information contained in the advanced shipping notice from the application computer to the user computer for items that are not stocked in the dispensing units.

12. (As Filed) A method as in claim 10, further comprising restocking the shipped items into the dispensing units, reconciling the restocked items with the advanced shipping notice using the dispensing unit processor, and electronically sending a confirmation receipt to the server computer from the dispensing units.

13. (As Filed) A method as in claim 12, further comprising electronically sending the receipt from the server computer to the supplier computers and to the electronic requisition and purchasing system.

14. (As Filed) A method as in claim 13, further comprising generating an electronic invoice at the supplier computer based on the receipt, and electronically sending the invoice to the business portal computer and the application computer.

15. (As Filed) A method as in claim 14, further comprising electronically transmitting the electronic invoice from the application computer to the electronic requisition and purchasing system, and generating payment using the electronic requisition and purchasing system.

16. – 30. (Previously Canceled)

31. (Amended) A method for supplying consigned items to a plurality of dispensing units, the method comprising:

        providing a plurality of dispensing units that each hold a plurality of each of multiple distinct items on consignment from an external supplier, wherein the units

have a processor and a memory for storing a record of inventory levels of each distinct item;

       periodically sending restocking information from the dispensing units over a network to a server computer, wherein the restocking information includes a restock quantity for each distinct item;

       aggregating the restock quantities over the plurality of dispensing units for each of the multiple distinct items;

       generating ordering information for the items to be restocked based on the aggregated restocking information; and

       electronically sending the ordering information to one or more supplier computers to order items to be restocked into the dispensing unit.

       32. (Amended) A method for supplying items to a plurality of dispensing units, the method comprising:

       providing a plurality of dispensing units that each hold a plurality of each of multiple distinct items, wherein the units have a processor and a memory for storing a record of inventory levels of each distinct item;

       periodically sending restocking information from the dispensing units over a network to a server computer, wherein the restocking information includes a restock quantity for each distinct item;

       generating an aggregated list of distinct items and their associated quantities that are to be restocked based on the restocking information;

       providing a hosted procurement application to permit manual selection of suppliers, manufacturers, and quantities for the items in the aggregated list;

       generating ordering information for the items to be restocked based on the manual selection using the hosted procurement application; and

       electronically sending the ordering information to one or more supplier computers to order items to be restocked into the dispensing unit.

33. (As Filed) A method as in claim 32, further comprising electronically posting desired items and quantities using the hosted procurement application to permit suppliers to provide electronic quotes for supplying the supplies.

34. (As Filed) A method as in claim 32, further comprising ordering items that are not on the aggregated list using the hosted procurement application.

35. (As Filed) A method as in claim 32, further comprising electronically posting suppliers, manufactures of items carried by the suppliers and their associated prices using the hosted procurement application to permit manual selection of the suppliers and manufacturers.

36. – 55. (Previously Canceled)

IN THE DRAWINGS:

Please add Figs. 14A – 14C. A Letter to Official Draftsman requesting addition of these drawings is submitted concurrently herewith.

REMARKS

1. Drawings

Objections have been made to the drawings as failing to disclose every feature specified in the claims. Figs. 14A – 14C have accordingly been added as flow diagrams that track the steps recited in Claims 1 – 15 and 31 – 35, and corresponding textual description of the flow diagrams has been added to the specification. Care has been taken to ensure that the flow diagrams and text follow the claims, and accordingly no new matter has been added.